Philosophies Of Education

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Abstract: Teachers have different philosophies of education. They have different beliefs regarding the most effective methods in the classroom, they have different concepts about how students should learn, and they even have different views of human nature. Teachers' philosophy of education depends on a set of general principles, perceptions, and attitudes. At the beginning of the school year, teachers raise many complex questions in regards to education such as what is the teacher's role, what is the students' role, what material should be taught, how should the material be taught, and who should choose the material? Answers to these questions differ among teachers according to their beliefs and experiences. Moreover, answers differ from school to school and country to country according to the educational system that they are bound to.

Keywords: Education, Pedagogy, Philosophy, Teachers, Classroom, Students

Introduction:

There are many different philosophies in education and each one has its own principles that motivate teachers to achieve the highest methods of teaching. These philosophies help teachers to develop their own philosophy of education, which will guide them through their years of teaching. The purpose of this paper is to highlight the four main educational theories: progressivism, existentialism, critical theory, and perennialism and state the differences between them. Teachers learn more about education not only through learning these philosophies, but also through their experiences, and teachers' preparation programs. Through my teaching experiences and education, I have found the best method for my classroom and students have been through the implementation of Paulo Freire's philosophy of education.

1. Educational Philosophies Approaches

After reading and understanding the different philosophical and ideological derivations in educational theories in Gutek's text book and other educational books, I am now able to modify my philosophy, select, and use what I consider to

be a more appropriate educational theory for my students' learning. There is no right or wrong philosophy; therefore, it is very essential to embrace some of the principles and views of some educational theories into my teaching process. For example, if I support group work to help students increase their academic knowledge and encourage initiative, creativity, and self-expression, I will be reflecting progressivism. If I encourage students to make responsible choices about what to study, I will be reflecting existentialism. If I decide that students' choices must include topics on social issues, I will be reflecting critical theory. Lastly, if I teach students the recurrent universal and timeless truths, perennialism would be my choice of educational theory (Your philosophy of education, p. 56).

I was unaware of what type of educational philosophy I was using until I read this book and searched for other references. When I began teaching in the Country of Kuwait, my educational philosophy was a combination of perennialism and essentialism. I was following a rigorous curriculum, using traditional methods as

well as focusing on the students' improvement in reading, listening, and critical thinking (Gutek, 2004). My role was to give the information and the students' role was to memorize the lesson, whether they understood the subject or not. I would rely strictly on using specific textbooks and not diversifying with other learning resources. The school considered the teacher as the center of the learning process instead of the student.

Moving to the United States provided me with the opportunity to attend several educational workshops and conferences that highlighted the different educational philosophies and different models of teaching. Moreover, I have found that traditional methods are not the correct way to educate the students. I have discovered that I should think of the students as "builders of knowledge" more than "absorbers of information" (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, p.22). I should be a facilitator who helps students in exploring new ideas about their lives, their schoolwork, and their relations with others. The first philosophy I have learned is the constructivism philosophy. I have learned that constructivism consists of four families, which have various models of teaching. These families are: the information-processing family, the social family, the personal family, and the behavioral family (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2004). I began using these models of teaching through creating learning activities that emphasize on the students' engagement, inquiry, problem solving, and collaboration with others. As a teacher, my role changed to an assistant rather than a lecturer through encouraging learners to explore, suggest, and question their own ideas, and information. Assisting the students in developing new knowledge, connecting it with their previous learning, and applying it into their real world added to my goals of teaching.

Reading recently about progressivism as a theory of education, I found that there is a resemblance between it and constructivism. Progressivism emphasizes on stimulating students' development through activities that encourage creativity and self-reference as well as collaborative learning that features group cooperation. Progressivism focuses on the teachers' role as facilitators of learning rather than as someone who only assigns tasks. The main goal of education is to be multifunctional which focuses not only on the students' academic development, but also on the emotional, physical, social, and intellectual growth (Gutek, p.300).

Looking back to the lesson plans I have taught, I found that I was using the progressivism theory in my teaching for several years. However, I did not know that the learning activities I involved fell under the progressivism umbrella until I read *Philosophical and Ideological Voices in Education*. As a teacher, I always coach and encourage students to think, analyze, and explore. In my teaching, I use different learning activities such as inductive thinking, attaining concepts, inquiry training, synectics, and advance organizer. Moreover, I involve role-playing, partners in learning, jurisprudential inquiry, and I use the concepts of self- model. Last but not least, I use the mastery learning and learning from stimulation models.

2. My Philosophy of Education

As a foreign language teacher, teaching advanced level Arabic language for college students, my educational philosophy statement is the goals, objectives, methods, and approaches that I set up and plan to achieve before starting each course. My statement includes the course topic, assignments, assessments, and strategies that I will be using in my teaching. In addition, I believe that there are some essential elements I need to implement to establish a healthy environment. First, I should be a mentor for the students. Second, I should provide students with the opportunity of learning by directing their process with dialogue. Third, I should encourage respect for all students and cooperation among them. Fourth, I should be aware of the students'

diversity, communicate with and get to know them and their cultural background. Dewey, one of the key figures in the progressivism philosophy, advises teachers to allow students to share their personal experiences and prior knowledge. He asserts in an article on the relationship between theory and practice in teacher education that the "greatest asset in the student's possession – the greatest, moreover that ever will be in his possession – [is] his own direct and personal experience" (Delpit, p. 124).

My educational philosophy in the country of Kuwait was influenced first by the beliefs, culture, and traditions I was raised on. My beliefs and culture are based on the principles of Islam, the true teaching of the Quran and hadiths (the teachings of Prophet Mohammad, peace be upon him). Within these influences, education mostly stresses on moral ideas and values (idealism) and basic education (essentialism). Second, it is gradually influenced by several educational philosophies and philosophers. Paulo Freire's philosophy of education has caught my attention and encouraged me to try it in the classroom.

Freire questioned the educational system, which he considered to be suffering from narration sickness. He said, "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (Freire, p. 72). The teachers' role is to put information into students' mind and the students' role is to copy and memorize it. Freire believed that education should be a two-way exchange of beliefs, thoughts, and ideas. He saw humans as subjects in the process of learning where education is not just teaching someone how to read and write, but also reflecting on their culture and actions. As an instructor, teaching advanced level Arabic language for college students, I use Freire's ideas to teach my lessons. For example, the lessons I teach should relate to the Arab World. I start the lesson by engaging the student in an introductory discussion about the image of the Arab man and gather from them any and all

information that they might have related to that topic. Then, I choose specific expressions used in the text and ask students to deconstruct them into their roots in order to understand its meaning.

Freire recommended interaction, communication, and dialogue among educators and their learners. "Knowledge emerges only through invention and reinvention, through the restless, impatient continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, and with each other" (Freire, p.72).

In groups, I ask the student to come up with a scripted play that talks about an Arab family with a weak father and an overbearing mother in addition to many children and friends each with his/her own personality. In the final project, the student will write a piece on the effects of child rearing practices on shaping the personalities of their sons and daughters and whether that will affect how these kids treat their families later in life.

"Human beings are not built in silent, but in word, in work, in action reflection" (Freire, p. 88). Students are then asked to orally discuss in groups of four a comparison of the Arab man with the American man and how child-rearing practices contribute to the production of such images. Freire stated that dialogue is presented as the essence of education in the practice of freedom. He added that true dialogue cannot exist between humans without love, humility, faith, hope, and critical thinking. By the end of the lesson, students should be able to focus on seeking out materials related to Arab social issues and be able to analyze the content, compare it to information available in their own language, and assess the linguistic and cultural differences. They should be able to present (in oral and written forms) information, concepts, and ideas pertaining to the varying images of Arab men in the Arab world to an audience of listeners or readers. They should also be able to describe, explain to others, and compare the Arab man's personality based on the readings and discussions done in the classroom.

Paulo Freire offered me brilliant ideas to achieve the best educational system and provided me with many critical tools to use in teaching. I learned that effective learning means creating activity projects, supporting collaboration and group work.

As an educator, I must motivate students to be more independent by reproducing the texts that already exist and having them create their own texts. I must get them to become involved in critical thinking of what they do, act and construct. I believe that effective learning exists when the students typically complete projects that involve themselves with the learning material.

I learned that dialogue is the key element in learning. "The dialogue established between the two subjects helps to increase reciprocal kindness, something that is an act of bravery, not cowardice," (Democracy and Governance, 2010).

My philosophy of teaching appears in different ways in my classroom. It appears through the classroom management, delivery of instruction, student interaction, peer interaction, and updating of knowledge. I am committed to develop and support the teaching and learning of the Arabic language by keeping things simple, providing teaching based on modern pedagogical methods, and pushing them to think and make decisions.

I understand that effective teaching requires of me to foster a high level of student involvement in the subject matter, which help them to learn readily.

I enjoy teaching my students logical reasoning and independent thought, as well as transmitting knowledge and adopting a new language. My responsibility is to arouse curiosity, stretch minds, inspire, generate enthusiasm, and repeat good work habits. As Dewey said, the main purpose of education is growth. He asserted that, "To grow means to have more activity, more problems, more resolutions to problem, and a greater network of social relationship" (Gutek, .76). Furthermore, I am setting an example for my students of responsible conduct as a teacher and as

a member of society.

3. Summary

Teaching a new language means exposing students to a new world of information and knowledge. Therefore, my goals of teaching are mixed of several educational philosophies; yet, they are mostly based on progressivism principles. My first goal is to develop a powerful learner who can live, involve, engage, and communicate in his/her new world. Second, assist students to master the Arabic language by providing them with a supportive, exciting environment, and one that invites dialogue and sharing of ideas. Third, encourage students to cooperate and learn from one another. Fourth, encourage students to develop a deeper understanding of the context through investigation. Fifth, act as s facilitator and a guide. Sixth, create an appropriate environment to help students create new visions and help them achieve their goals.

By implementing the educational philosophies, theories, and models of teaching that are mentioned earlier in this paper, students will be involved in many learning skills that will support them to master the Arabic language and will familiarize them with the social environment of the country. Each teacher has his/her own educational philosophy of which he/she works within.

Although each philosophy is different, a teacher's goal is to educate students to reach their full potential and beyond. To conclude, the philosophy used is what creates adept students who are able to take what they have learned and implement it into their future.

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